Nixon Backed By Hill Only Half the Time

By Kimball W. Brace

Whatever else Congress did or didn't accomplish in 1973, it learned to say "no" to President Nixon.

The White House expressed its wishes on 310 legislative votes during the year, and got its way only 50.6 per cent of the time. It was the lowest percentage of support any president has had since Congressional Quarterly began making annual studies of the subject in 1953.

Before last year, the low was 52 per cent, recorded by a Democratic Congress during the Eisenhower administration in 1959. The new figures were a dramatic change from 1972, when Mr. Nixon won 66 per cent of the time, and an even greater turnaround from the Nixon high of 77 per cent, recorded in 1970.

Members of both houses said the Watergate affair was not the most important reason for the 1973 decline. They attributed much of the change to the President's threats early in the year to dismantle long-standing social programs.

"They cut off disaster aid and rural environmental assistance and rural water-sewer funds," said Rep. John M. Zwach (R-Minn.). "These were things we naturally were not going to go along with."

In general, the final averages for 1973 confirmed what had been apparent in August, when a special CQ study showed a precipitous drop in presidential support for the first seven months of the session.

At that time, the support score was 43 per cent. A year-end flood of confirmations, treaties and other non-controversial legislation spared Mr. Nixon the distinction of being the only President even to lose more votes than he won in a single congressional year.

"Right at the end of the year," said Sen. Richard S. Schweiker (R-Pa.), "there were a lot of nominations and the energy thing. We're all for measures to help save energy."

The decline in support was centered in the House. Though it backed the President 81 per cent of the time in 1972, the support score plummeted to 48 per cent in 1973. The Senate, less friendly to the President in 1972, did not have as far to fall. Its decline was only two points, from 54 per cent to 52 per cent.

In both chambers, Democrats went along with the President less than half the time—37 per cent in the Senate and 35 per cent in the House. Republicans voted on the Nixon side 61 per cent of the time in the Senate and 62 per cent in the House, a relatively slight decline from 1972.

As in previous years, southerners were more likely to go along with the President's wishes than those in any other regional bloc. This was true in both parties. The average southern Senate Republican backed the President 69 per cent of the time, while his Democratic counterpart voted on Mr. Nixon's side 47 per cent of the time, both well above the national averages for their parties.

Midwestern Democrats were the most frequent Nixon opponents in the Senate, voting with him 30 per cent of the time. In the House, that distinction went to Democrats from the East, who had a 29 per cent support score.

The Nebraska delegation, all five of whose members are Republicans, led all states in their support for the President. The Massachusetts delegation, which is 10-4 Democratic, had the lowest support score.

The House Republican leadership demonstrated its loyalty to the White House, as party leaders held the four highest individual scores in support of the President. Barber B. Conable Jr. (N.Y.), the chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee, led all House members with an 86, and was followed by Gerald R. Ford (Mich.), who was minority leader until his confirmation as Vice President Dec. 6. He scored 80. Next were party whip Leslie C. Arends (Ill.), and party conference vice chairman Samuel R. Devine (Ohio), both with 79.

In the Senate, the top 16 Nixon supporters were all Republicans, led by Clifford P. Hansen (Wyo.), who scored a 78. Tops among Democrats was James B. Allen (Ala.), with 66.

The 310 votes on which Mr. Nixon took a position during the year was the largest number of presidential tests in the 20-year history of the study. But the increase was due mainly to the fact that Congress was voting more often than in the past—a record number of 1,135 votes in 1973. The President took a position on 27 per cent of these votes, well above his 10 per cent figure for 1972, but below the 20-year average of 45 per cent.

Among Washington area lawmakers, Rep. Gilbert Gude of Maryland ranked second among all House Republicans in votes opposing the Presdient, with 57 per cent. He supported the President 40 per cent of the time. Other Maryland percentages:

Sen. J. Glenn Beall (R: 68 for, 30 against.

Sen. Charles Mathias (R): 43 for, 42 against.

Rep. Robert E. Bauman (R), who took office last Sept. 5: 54 for, 40 against.

Rep. Clarence Long (D): 30 for, 58 against.

Rep. Paul Sarbanes (D): 28 for, 72 against.

Rep. Marjorie Holt (R): 69 for, 30 against.

Rep. Lawrence Hogan (R): 67 for 31 against.

Rep. Goodloe Byron (D): 57 for, 42 against.

Rep. Parren Mitchell (D): 22 for, 73 against.

Virginia percentages.

Sen. Harry F. Byrd Jr. (Ind): 63 for, 33 against.

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Sen. William L. Scott (R): 72 for, 20 against.

Rep. Thomas Downing (D): 51 for 41 against.

Rep. G. William Whitehurst (R): 72 for, 26 against.

Rep. David Satterfield (D): 65 for, 30 against.

Rep. Robert Daniel (R): 72 for, 25 against.

Rep. W. C. (Dan) Daniel(D: 66 for, 34 against.

Rep. M. Caldwell Butler (R): 75 for, 23 against.

Rep. J. Kenneth Robinson (R): 75 for, 24 against

Rep. Stanford Parris (R): 64 for, 33 against.

Rep.. William Wampler (R): 69 for, 30 against.

Rep. Joel Broyhill (R): 70 for, 26 against.